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OCI No. 1430/63

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
24 April 1963

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Political Implications of Strikes in
British Guiana

1. The efforts of organized labor in British Guiana to block passage of a labor relations bill designed to put Premier Jagan's government in a position to dominate labor have led to an explosive situation. There is a possibility that Jagan may fall as a result, but the odds seem better that he will end up in a stronger position.

2. By the evening of 22 April, nearly all trade unions in British Guiana were on strike--although support for the strike move by the largest union was said to be unenthusiastic. Order was being maintained by security forces, and skeleton crews were maintaining essential services. At 6:30 p.m. the same evening, however, the legislative council passed the government's controversial labor relations bill, which the strike was intended to prevent. The bill next requires passage by the Senate, which is expected with ease, and signing by the governor who has not hitherto blocked legislation. In the circumstances, the next moves of any of the protagonists can only be the subject of speculation.

3. Should the strike soon collapse, Jagan probably would emerge strengthened both by having secured legislation which would permit him in time to dominate organized labor, and by having demonstrated the ineffectiveness of his opposition. Lack of funds probably would preclude continuation of the strike beyond a week, even if the union leadership remained resolute. Violence would become a possibility when the workers run out of cash--which might happen as early as 26 April--and in the event of violence, the British would probably feel obliged to uphold the Jagan government to keep order.

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4. Since Jagan controls the radio, and the press is on strike, the opposition is denied an effective means of maintaining its popular support. Two of Jagan's legislators who seemed inclined to support the opposition position in a 17 April debate stayed with the government on the 22 April vote. This indicates that both suspect Jagan would win any new elections, and fear the consequences of cooperating with the opposition.

5. Should the strike continue effective, Jagan might be led to resign. If he did, he would almost certainly request new elections--a demand the governor probably could not constitutionally refuse. For the governor to ask another leader to form a government would be without precedent in British Guiana, and a government formed in such circumstances probably could not survive. As a final alternative to chaos or violence, the British might suspend the constitution and resume direct control, which they are most reluctant to do. In any case, should London call new elections at its own decision or Jagan's request, this would reopen the whole basic question of what electoral system to have--which has been at issue since last November.

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